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Kurdistan Regional Governments' U.S. Representative Says Kurdistan Rose to the Challenge of Free and Fair Elections *Qubad Talabani Addresses Middle East Institute*

Washington, US – (KRG.org) – The Kurdistan Regional Government's Representative to the United States, Qubad Talabani, on Tuesday said that the Kurdistan Region successfully held free, fair and vibrant elections, and will continue on the path of democratic self-governance. Mr. Qubad Talabani addressed an audience of some 100 policy makers and academics at the Middle East Institute (MEI), a non-governmental organization that fosters understanding of the Middle East among Americans.

Mr. Talabani said, “We were challenged by some to achieve the ‘gold standard’ in elections. We accepted that challenge – and we delivered. We have achieved much in our experiment in democratic self governance – and of course there is much more to achieve. And we intend to achieve it.”

Mr. Talabani talked of the open and competitive vote that re-elected Massoud Barzani to the presidency with 69 percent, while electing to the parliament a broad and diverse representation from all sectors of the Kurdistan Region’s society.

“Now, there will be an even more vibrant opposition within the Kurdistan parliament,” he said. “We all expect vigorous debate and there certainly will be new dynamics within the KRG and throughout Iraqi Kurdistan.”

Mr. Talabani noted that the election was praised as transparent by the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq. Independent organizations including the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq, the US Embassy in Baghdad, the Presidency of the European Union and the Kurdish-American Congressional Caucus, the Arab League delegation and diplomats accredited to Iraq also commended the Kurdistan Region's election process. At least 30 percent of the new parliament will be female – a percentage greater than any regional or national government in the Middle East, North America and most of Europe.

Mr. Talabani also spoke about the recently launched KRG Strategy on Good Governance and Transparency, a program aimed at preventing corruption within government. He said, “We made the good governance initiative a priority. To that end, we teamed up with

world renowned consultants PriceWaterhouseCoopers to review current conditions, the way our government works and all governance related issues. This helped us develop a clear-eyed, blunt critique and action plan to address the crucial issues of good governance, anti-corruption and transparency.”

Mr. Talabani also discussed how the Kurdistan Region in Iraq still has steps to undertake before becoming a mature democracy. While after 1992 until recently security was the main focus, today with a stable society the government has the opportunity to institute a full and flourishing democracy.

Read Mr.Talabani's speech at the MEI.

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